



# Taking action on climate change and sustainability case studies from education settings

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Ethics application number: ER57072494

## Background information

- Climate Change and sustainability is only briefly mentioned in the national curriculum for schools and education settings in England (Parry & Merzger (2023).
- In April 2022, the Department for Education launched its strategy on sustainability which applies to its agencies and public bodies in England including early years, schools, FE, HE and children's social care. The strategy has four strategic aims (excellent in education, net zero, resilience to climate change and a better environment for future generations) (DfE, 2022).
- However, there is only limited reference to national curriculum opportunities. There is hope that through the ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR), climate change and sustainability will become more prominent.
- This piece of research was carried out using internal funding to showcase good practice in different settings using short 'Q&A' style case studies.

## Methodology

- Interviews took place online between January 2024 – August 2024. Participants were recruited via existing professional networks where examples of good practice had been identified.
- A balance of primary, secondary, SEND and colleges that were LA maintained or academies were recruited, as well as a MAT leader and a local authority. An interview with an SEND teacher was undertaken but not included here, however was used in a [Teaching Citizenship Journal](#) (page 46, Issue 58).
- Online interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were transcribed using online tools.
- Ethical approval was sought before the study took place in line with Sheffield Hallam University's policy
- Participants gave consent before interviews. This included consenting to being linked and named in individual case studies.
- Case studies were constructed with the external support of a professional copywriter, written in an informal manner. These were uploaded to the website [research.shu.ac.uk/sustainability](http://research.shu.ac.uk/sustainability)

## References

- Department for Education. (2022). *Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems*. Retrieved 26/09/2023, from [www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy/sustainability-and-climate-change-a-strategy-for-the-education-and-childrens-services-systems)
- Parry, S., & Metzger, E. (2023). Barriers to learning for sustainability: a teacher perspective. *Sustainable Earth Reviews*, 6(1), 2.

## Findings

- Participants felt that climate change and sustainability wasn't prominent in the curriculum and needed to be embedded in all subjects. This would enable time and resource to be released to develop these crucial opportunities.
- With FE participants, sustainability felt to be more embedded, as colleges tend to collaborate with employers who need leavers with these skills.
- Where settings and staff had a greater culture of autonomy, climate change and sustainability elements of the curriculum were more likely to be developed.

Barriers	Enablers
The strategy isn't mandatory, so it isn't prioritised by settings, therefore, inconsistent approaches between settings	National schemes with local officers to support settings e.g. National Education Nature Park and Let's Go Zero
Training and CPD are needed for all staff	Some external funding is available and support from NGOs and charities
Often piecemeal content – driven by individuals, sometimes with individual year groups	Local authority support with resource to centrally support which includes funding and training
Time and space in the curriculum limits those opportunities	Passionate people who have the authority and autonomy to oversee climate change education on a local level in schools and MATS
Resources and funding for projects is limited	Senior leaders that recognise the benefits

Summary of barriers and enablers identified from participants

## Implications for Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

- Education settings are undertaking climate and sustainability action however training is limited. This gap could be filled through ITE – which could cover the basic science of climate change, pedagogy around climate change and sustainability education and research such as eco-anxiety.
- ITE providers could raise awareness of external organisations, funded by the Department for Education, supporting settings on a national level (such as the National Education Nature Park, Let's Go Zero, Climate Ambassadors and Sustainability Support Hub).
- Local examples of good practice could be provided and shared with trainees



Some of the case study participants

- 8 Leicester case studies
- 14 case studies
- 6 Sheffield case studies
- 7 primary schools
- 1 local authority lead
- 2 post-16 colleges
- 1 MAT leader
- 6 maintained schools